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ABSTRACT

This book presents an overview of the different policy approaches to educational disadvantage and equity within the Australian public school system. It highlights two general trends: the shift toward school-based management and funding approaches increasingly directed toward reading and mathematics achievement. More specifically, the book: (1) provides an overview of current approaches to equity in Australian public schools in the context of Australia's federal structure; (2) discusses differing policy approaches, the underlying assumptions for such approaches, and reasons for changing approaches; and (3) offers two examples of good practices for addressing educational disadvantage and comments on how principles deriving from such practices may be integrated into broader policy and system frameworks. The book draws on research conducted in 1998 involving interviews with key national policymakers and five selected education authorities, together with an analysis of relevant documents from these authorities. It concludes that the most successful programs to foster equity steer away from extremes. The most important factor is involvement. Successful programs involve the community, teachers, and schools as active partners in reform and engage students intellectually and socially in the learning process. (WFA)

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IIEP research and studies programme

**Strategies of education and training for disadvantaged groups**

# Policy approaches to educational disadvantage and equity in Australian schooling

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**Miriam Henry**

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International Institute for Educational Planning

Strategies of education and training for disadvantaged groups

# Policy approaches to educational disadvantage and equity in Australian schooling

Miriam Henry

International Institute for Educational Planning

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACEE | Australian Centre for Equity through Education |
| DEET | Department of Employment, Education and Training |
| DEETYA | Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs |
| DSP | Disadvantaged Schools Programme |
| MCEETYA | Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs |
| NPEG | National Policy for the Education of Girls |
| NSN | National Schools Network |



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## PRESENTATION OF THE SERIES

The theme of the education and training of disadvantaged groups is high on the agenda in many countries, because it is related to a much wider phenomenon: growing deprivation and social exclusion. This situation is not only disturbing, it is also a paradox in that the increase of poverty and exclusion often goes hand in hand with economic growth. This worrying observation implies that an increase in wealth is not a sufficient remedy, but must be accompanied by job creation and the redistribution of revenues.

It is evident that a scarcity of jobs or employment opportunities are often at the heart of the problem of deprivation and social exclusion. However, non-access to educational and training programmes is also a critical factor. In fact, low levels of schooling, or even the total absence of schooling, often contribute to a precarious integration into the job market.

The role of education is not just limited to giving young people access to jobs and a decent living wage. The admission of disadvantaged groups to educational and training programmes is part of the wider concern of promoting the educational process throughout one's life, the indispensable condition not only for a durable integration into the job market, but also for a full and active citizenship. Moreover, in most cases, educational investment produces long-term effects, allowing one to eradicate the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next.

Educational and training programmes are still poorly adapted to the needs of disadvantaged groups, a fact which is confirmed by the high percentage of children leaving school at an early age. To respond to these needs, the public sector has had recourse to various mechanisms. Moreover, private initiatives are proliferating outside

of formal education channels thanks to the involvement of NGOs, often drawing on outside aid. Despite the undeniable contribution that they have made to disadvantaged groups, their overall achievements do not constitute a satisfactory response, given the seriousness of the problem. No solution will really be found as long as the education system continues to produce social outcasts. That is why it is important to draw the appropriate conclusions from these evaluations, taken from both the public and private sectors, and to set up a funding process needed for a more global approach to the problem.

The research project on 'Alternative educational and training strategies for disadvantaged groups', which the Institute is continuing to develop and elaborate, has in fact as its main objective the gathering and sharing of information on educational and training projects and programmes aimed at the disadvantaged. The second objective consists of studying their content in detail. The third is to examine the existing machinery between public administrations and other key players, and to analyze the tools and methods used to evaluate these projects and programmes. The final aim is to encourage political and technical dialogue, and to bolster national capacities to create and implement programmes aimed at the disadvantaged.

The notion of disadvantaged groups is difficult to grasp in any concrete sense. It can be defined in several ways, according to various criteria (social, economic, etc.). It is also a relative concept, including different realities according to context. That is why the current project does not exhaust all aspects of this concept. It confines itself to studying unqualified young people who have not had access to schools or who have been prematurely excluded.

The project is especially interested in the role of the various players in the public sector. This preoccupation revolves around a double-pronged series of questions:

- How to open up and adapt educational and training systems so as to give access to the disadvantaged? Is this possible? What are the appropriate strategies? Under what conditions are they to be applied?

- How to delegate teaching and training responsibilities for disadvantaged groups to other players: NGOs, local initiatives, community associations, the business sector, etc.? How to promote, guide, control, co-ordinate, finance and evaluate their actions?

These two options are complementary. In fact, it can be assumed that the experience gained in initiatives launched on behalf of disadvantaged groups will have wider repercussions of benefit to overall educational policies.

Australia provides an interesting example of some of the problems that a developed country has to deal with in terms of equity. Although it does not have the firmly entrenched class structure that exists in some other parts of the world, it does have a heterogeneous population, which includes indigenous groups and immigrants or descendants of immigrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds. In addition, the population is unevenly spread across the country, with a majority living in cities, but a certain number living in extremely isolated areas. The social consequences of this are that specific groups may well be at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the population, and the Australian education system has therefore made a concerted effort to cater for these groups, particularly in the past few decades.

This book looks at the changes and developments in Australian educational policy since the creation of the Schools Commission in the 1970s. Although in Australia the Constitution provides that educational policy is decided at the regional (state or territory) level, it was thanks to this commission that equity policy was first co-

ordinated at the national level and a number of groups were identified as needing special attention. A series of policies was subsequently developed by successive governments to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and other disadvantaged groups.

One of the issues faced by policy-makers, and which still has not found a definitive solution, has been the type of approach to adopt, i.e. to what extent these groups' needs should be treated by specific programmes, or whether it is the mainstream curriculum that should be adapted so as to encompass wider concerns. A more delicate issue is the degree to which these groups themselves should adapt to the mainstream – an example being the question of mother-tongue teaching.

An important realization has been that so-called disadvantaged groups are not self-contained entities and that factors such as class, ethnicity and gender interact to produce different experiences and outcomes. In the same way, education, and the issues that it raises, must always be considered in the wider social context.

Although the author hesitates to draw conclusions about the comparative effectiveness of the different policy approaches outlined in the report, she does provide some examples of good practices which underscore the importance of involving all the actors and stakeholders concerned by educational reform, and the necessity of designing curricula in such a way that all students will be able to relate to and find their place in today's knowledge-based society.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This booklet gives an overview of different policy approaches to educational disadvantage and equity in the Australian public school system, past and present. It discusses their respective merits and flaws and provides some examples of good practices.

It looks mainly at the policies developed at the national level, but also takes into account strategies developed and implemented as a part of regional (state or territory) educational policies.

It was in the 1970s that a semi-autonomous body was first established to advise the Australian Government on education issues. Four programmes were subsequently instigated to deal with the needs of disadvantaged groups: the Disadvantaged Schools Programme, which was to become one of the most long-standing programmes and has remained a reference; the Aboriginal Education Programme; the Country Areas Programme; and the English-as-a-Second-Language Programme.

Taking this as a starting point, the author looks at the subsequent developments in equity policy in Australia and the types of issues dealt with. Most of the strategies implemented have recognized that there are certain target groups with special needs to be met, in particular: students from indigenous or non-English-speaking backgrounds, socio-economically disadvantaged students, geographically isolated students, and girls. However, attitudes continue to evolve as to how to address their needs and, even now, there are a number of debates that have still not been resolved, and which can be summed up as follows:

- *Special programmes vs. mainstreaming*: should equity issues be addressed by specific programmes or brought into the mainstream curriculum (e.g. gender)?

- *Equity priorities vs. a focus on literacy and numeracy*: can disadvantaged groups be identified and their problems addressed through a focus on literacy and numeracy, or should wider cultural factors be taken into account?
- *Earmarked funding vs. broadbanding*: should schools be given greater discretionary capacity to address local priorities or is the subsequent reduced accountability detrimental to the success of programmes?
- *Equality of opportunity vs. equality of outcomes*: do disadvantaged groups require additional resources or different treatment to be able to perform on a par with the rest of the community?
- *Accountability*: is an 'outcomes' approach detrimental to processes? And in what way should performance be linked to funding?

The monograph shows that the most successful programmes manage to steer between extremes, but also that there are several factors that must not be neglected, the most important of these being 'involvement': i.e. involving the community, involving teachers and schools as active partners in reform, and engaging students intellectually and socially in the learning process.

# I. INTRODUCTION

This report aims to clarify differing policy approaches to educational disadvantage and equity in Australian schooling. It will:

- provide an overview of current approaches to equity in Australian schooling in the context of Australia's federal structure[1];
- discuss differing policy approaches, the underlying assumptions for such approaches and reasons for changing approaches;
- offer two examples of good practices for addressing educational disadvantage and comment on how principles deriving from such practices may be integrated into broader policy and system frameworks.

The report draws on research conducted in 1998 involving interviews with key policy-makers in Commonwealth and five selected state education authorities together with an analysis of relevant documents from those authorities.[2] Developments in the public schooling system only are examined.[3]

1. In addition to the Commonwealth government, there are six state and two territory governments in Australia: Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory. In this report, the term 'state' is used to denote both state and territory.
2. The research project, 'The conceptualization, funding and monitoring of programmes relating to educational equity and disadvantage in Australian schooling', was conducted by Miriam Henry and Sandra Taylor, funded by the Education Faculty, Queensland University of Technology. Interviews were conducted with policy-makers from: the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs; the Education Department of the Australian Capital Territory; the Department of Education, New South Wales; Education Queensland; the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services; and the Directorate for School Education, Victoria. Additionally, representatives from the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, the National Schools Network and the Australian Centre for Equity through Education were interviewed. Individuals are not identified in this report. Where interviews are cited, the location of interviewees is given in square brackets if this is not clear from the context.
3. About 30 per cent of students are educated in the non-government sector, including a substantial Catholic education system. The Catholic system has also developed policy on equity and social justice, not considered here.


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# II. BACKGROUND

## Equity policy developments in Australia

Constitutionally, education is the responsibility of the states. However, since the 1970s the Commonwealth has taken an increasing interest in schooling, extending its involvement via supplementary funding for special programmes and the development of Commonwealth and, later, national policies and curriculum frameworks (see Chapter II, *National policy development*). The Commonwealth has thus played a significant role in the development of equity policy and programmes.

The Schools Commission, a quasi-autonomous body established in 1973 by the Whitlam Labour Government to provide independent advice to government on schooling, was significant in this regard. Under its auspices, a number of groups were identified as being 'educationally disadvantaged' and needing special attention. Commonwealth Special Programmes were set up – Disadvantaged Schools, Aboriginal Education, Country Areas and English as a Second Language – to address these inequalities and numerous reports addressing various aspects of social inequality and educational disadvantage were produced.

In 1987, the Commonwealth Education Department was incorporated into a mega-Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). The Schools Commission was abolished and replaced by a Schools Council which provided advice to a National Board of Employment, Education and Training under direct Ministerial control. With the change of government in 1996, DEET was expanded to include youth affairs (DEETYA) and the Schools Council was abolished. Following the 1998 federal election, employment was removed from the portfolio and the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs was formed. Since 1996, then, there has been no separate body providing advice to the Commonwealth on equity matters, though within

DEETYA there was an Equity Section, more recently renamed the Literacy and Numeracy Section.

Another body relevant to the development of equity policy was the Australian Education Council comprising Commonwealth and state education ministers and department heads. In the late 1980s, it became instrumental in the development of national policies such as the *National Policy for the Education of Girls* and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*. In 1990 the Australian Education Council commissioned a report on post-compulsory education, the Finn Report (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991), which set in motion a long chain of policy developments in vocational education and training pertinent to the upper years of secondary schooling. Measures to address equity issues were incorporated in these developments, but have not been reported upon here.

In 1993 the Australian Education Council was amalgamated with two other Ministerial Councils with complementary portfolios to form the Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), comprising relevant Commonwealth and state ministers. This new body replaced the Australian Education Council from the beginning of 1994. MCEETYA oversees the production of annual national reports on schooling which, amongst other things, indicate progress on equity matters within each of the state systems.

State schooling systems have been active independently in the development of equity policy and programmes, though in an uneven manner depending on political and economic climates. While different systems evolved different administrative arrangements, all have established equity units within which sub-units have taken responsibility for policy and programme development with respect to identified 'target' groups, for example gender, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, students with disabilities, etc. In all

systems, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education has had separate funding and administrative arrangements.

The development of national policies in the mid-eighties and onwards signalled a changing policy environment promoting both greater co-operation between the Commonwealth and state governments, and greater tensions. Labour governments, because of their corporatist approach to policy-making[4] and coalition governments, because of a philosophical commitment to 'states' rights', both paid lip service to a 'new federalism' giving states greater autonomy. At the same time, there was a growing consensus that nine separate arenas of policy-making (the Commonwealth plus six states and two territories) had to be joined in a national effort for Australia to enter the global economy. This exerted pressure for centralization, at times resisted by the states.

## National policy developments

Development of national policies involves a process of consultation between, and common agreement amongst, the Commonwealth and states. Thus:

> *A national strategy should encapsulate the spirit and rationale of educational equity policies in the states and territories, and provide a basis for the development of such policies in those states that have not yet mounted their own educational equity strategies... A national strategy should articulate* ***common and agreed priorities for strategic action*** *and a means of assessing the nation's progress on meeting those priorities* (MCEETYA, 1994, p. 3, original emphasis).

4. Corporatism denoted a consensual approach to governance in which key partners – different levels of government, business and industry, unions – were given a voice.

National policies and strategies stand in contrast to Commonwealth policies, which express particular Commonwealth priorities and which operate on the basis of tied grants to the states. The Disadvantaged Schools Programme (see below) was a significant Commonwealth policy. The *National Policy for the Education of Girls* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987) marked the first of a series of national policies addressing equity issues in schooling, followed by the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (DEET, 1989). Others include the *National Equity Programme for Schools* (DEET, 1992), the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-7* (Australian Education Council, 1993), the *National Strategy for Equity in Schooling* (MCEETYA, 1994), *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002* (MCEETYA, 1995a) and *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* (MCEETYA, 1997).

The most recent pertinent national policy development is the *National Literacy and Numeracy Plan* (DEETYA, 1996). From this, a national literacy programme was produced which incorporated two previous Commonwealth-funded programmes: English as a Second Language and Disadvantaged Schools. The literacy programme marks a significant shift in equity approaches. Before discussing this policy and its implications in more detail, the following sections will outline key features of other Commonwealth and national policies and programmes.

## The Disadvantaged Schools Programme

The Disadvantaged Schools Programme (DSP) was discontinued as a Commonwealth programme in 1997, though it remains as a component of equity programmes in most states. However, the DSP is noteworthy first due to its long duration (1974-1997) and secondly because for a significant number of people it remains a reference point against which other approaches are judged.

The DSP aimed to improve the participation and outcomes of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Since its inception it has provided extra funding to schools serving the poorest 15 per cent of students, calculated by a socio-economic status index using Australian Bureau of Statistics data.[5] Allocation of funds was based on submissions from state authorities who developed their own mechanisms for managing the programme and distributing funds. The most important features of the DSP were that it:

> ... *focused on whole-school change and improved school-community relations rather than on 'fixing up' individual deficit students. ... Instead of individual pathology and 'blaming the victim' assumptions, there was a focus on how school structures, curricula and pedagogies contributed to the reproduction of educational disadvantage across generations* (Lingard, 1998, p. 2).

One reason for the DSP's longevity was offered by Connell et al. (1991), who argued that the DSP both preached and practised a doctrine of democratic decision-making and community involvement. The programme generated networks of activist DSP teachers, contributing to a distinctive 'DSP culture' within the states. Consequently, Connell et al. suggest, reforms in DSP schools were more likely to be 'institutionalized' and less vulnerable to the movements of particular activist or innovative teachers. At the same time, the authors point out, the programme's strength was also its weakness, for the grass-roots emphasis meant that there was little overall co-ordination and little development of more systemic policy frameworks, allowing the DSP to become marginalized. Thus one long-standing DSP activist, for example, argued that the Programme "never delivered on whole school change" [interview: New South

5. Information on funding formulae is provided in Ross and Levacic (1998). In relation to Australia see, for example, pp. 8-9 and Chapter 7 by Caldwell and Hill.

Wales]; another that the DSP had become 'tired', its passing unmourned [interview: Commonwealth].

Nevertheless, as noted, the DSP remains as a component in most state systems to provide support for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and where its holistic, community-based aspect remains important. For example, Queensland describes its version of the DSP, the Special Programme Support Scheme, as characterized by:

> *... a willingness to advocate for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and to provide leadership in ensuring that issues related to achieving quality outcomes for those students are addressed ... This is enhanced by assisting regions and school communities to address specific issues related to poverty and education at the regional and school level* (Special Programme Support Scheme, 1996, p. iii).

### Gender policy developments

Initially, gender policy was oriented towards girls' education, reflecting the influence of the women's movement on education policy (Taylor et al., 1997, pp. 136-141). The *National Policy for the Education of Girls* (NPEG), introduced in 1987, set out a framework of priorities and strategies aimed at boosting girls' performance in schools. Four key objectives were specified:

- raising awareness of the educational needs of girls;
- equal access to and participation in an appropriate curriculum;
- supportive school environment;
- equitable resource allocation.

The NPEG was established as a set of guidelines rather than a prescriptive framework and was, therefore, taken up in different ways

in each state (Daws, 1995). The *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-7* which took effect in 1993 introduced a more formal and systematic form of accountability which required state authorities to report to MCEETYA on progress on key objectives. Outcomes, as noted earlier, were published in MCEETYA's annual national reports on schooling. The NPEG was oriented towards eliminating barriers facing girls in schools. As such, a range of strategies was developed around matters of the curriculum and school organization. Over time, such strategies were seen as important but insufficient for tackling issues such as sexual harassment, bullying and violence in schools. Concerns around these issues led to the argument that it was not possible to deal with the education of girls without also considering the education of boys. As a result, attention turned to the issue of gender relations and construction of gender – that is, of the ways in which notions of masculinity and femininity became defined within societies – and the implications of this for schooling. Thus the *National Action Plan* included 'eliminating sex-based harassment' and 'examining the construction of gender' among its eight priority areas.

Significant improvement in (some) girls' schooling outcomes, along with a decline in (some) boys' performance and retention rates, produced something of a backlash. While research showed that caution had to be applied in interpreting these trends (not all groups of girls were doing well and not all groups of boys were performing poorly – see Lingard, 1998), the 'what about the boys' issue gathered momentum. This, together with the interest in the construction of gender, contributed to a shift in policy focus from girls to gender, paying attention to the education of both girls and boys. Hence from 1997, the NPEG and the *Action Plan* were phased out and replaced by *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, which lists among its priorities:

- understanding the processes of gender construction;

- curriculum, teaching and learning;
- violence and school culture.

Significant in this evolution of policy was the understanding that girls (and boys) are not homogeneous groupings and that factors such as class and ethnicity interact to produce different experiences and outcomes for different groups of girls and boys.

## Developments in indigenous policy

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (DEET, 1989) came into effect in 1990, setting out a framework of priorities and actions in recognition that "Aborigines remain the most severely educationally disadvantaged people in Australia". Goals were set out under four themes: involvement, access, participation and outcomes. A review of progress achieved under the policy was conducted in 1995 (DEET, 1995) which found that while educational involvement, access and experiences had improved, significant inequities still occurred in opportunity and outcomes. The review commented that educational outcomes had to be placed "in a broad historical, cultural, economic and political context which necessarily includes the connections and interrelationships between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians" (p. 16). It observed that education needed to be "defined differently for indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and differently for the various groups of indigenous Australians" (p. 15). The review therefore endorsed a 'both ways' approach to education, which, it suggested, could provide a basis for thinking about how education can contribute to the process of reconciliation.

The review informed the production of a new policy framework, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002*, which identified key priority areas along with suggested outcomes and strategies. Priorities included:

- ensuring participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in educational decision-making;
- increasing employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in education and training;
- ensuring equitable and appropriate educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- promoting and supporting the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, cultures and languages to indigenous and non-indigenous students.

The policy also established a framework of outcomes-based reporting against selected quantitative and qualitative performance indicators. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter IV, *The shift to an outcomes focus*.

### National equity policy

In 1994, Commonwealth specific purpose programmes were brought together in the *National Equity Programme for Schools*. The *National Equity Programme* introduced new accountability mechanisms, with education authorities being required to demonstrate outcomes on various performance indicators to show how equity funds were being utilized. This was in line with a more general shift to outcomes-based governance in education at the time (Lingard, 1998, p. 5). Associated with the *National Equity Programme* was the *National Strategy for Equity in Schools* (NSES), released in 1995. Six categories of students whose educational outcomes were significantly lower than those of the population as a whole and "who require additional support and resources to improve their educational outcomes" were identified. It was noted, however, that these categories were not mutually exclusive and that strategies were needed to help address the issue of 'multiple disadvantage' (MCEETYA, 1995b, p. 71). As a result, in the *National Equity*

*Programme*, equity funding was broadbanded (see Chapter III, *Broadbanding*). The groups identified in the NSES were:

- students with disabilities, with learning difficulties or behavioural disorders;
- students at risk of dropping out of school;
- students from low socio-economic backgrounds or living in poverty;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- students from non-English-speaking backgrounds;
- students who are geographically isolated.[6]

NSES identified priorities for action and required that state authorities monitor and report annually against agreed performance measures by school systems. In so doing, the NSES institutionalized a 'strong' definition of equality, namely the belief that there should be equal outcomes from schooling amongst different social groups. (By contrast, a 'weak' approach emphasizes equality of opportunity). A mid-term review was also planned for 1998. However, this review did not occur. In 1997 there was a significant change in direction by the Commonwealth as equity priorities gave way to a focus on literacy and numeracy.

### National Literacy and Numeracy Plan

The *National Literacy and Numeracy Plan* came into effect in 1998. The thinking underlying this plan is conveyed in *Literacy for All: the challenge for Australian schools* (DEETYA, 1998) which stated: "Australia will go a long way towards countering other forms of educational and social disadvantage if strong foundational literacy and numeracy skills are successfully taught to all children" (p. 7). Under

6. Girls were no longer included among the groups needing additional support - and gender equity policy became 'mainstreamed' (see Chapter III, *Mainstreaming*).

the Plan, funds are "directed particularly to schools with a high proportion of students educationally disadvantaged in terms of their literacy and numeracy outcomes" (p. 11), and systems are required "to set priorities for resources which place the acquisition of effective literacy and numeracy at the centre of the whole enterprise of schooling" (p. 43).

In the plan, factors associated with 'placing educational outcomes at risk' were noted:

- socio-economic disadvantage;
- poverty;
- low parental expectation;
- disability;
- language background other than English;
- family or personal difficulties;
- geographic isolation;
- indigenous background;
- gender.

However, in identifying students 'at risk', the document warned against a deficit view, arguing that "... it is essential to avoid perspectives which confuse difference with deficit. The term 'at risk' implies a commitment to providing support when it is most needed, not a deficit view of students, nor a labelling and subsequent reduction of expectations for students ..." (p. 17). Major 'at risk' groups identified were students from a non-English-speaking background and indigenous students.

A strong emphasis was placed on the early years of schooling, reflecting a similar emphasis in the programmes of the states, for example: First Steps (Western Australia), Flying Start (Tasmania), Cornerstones (South Australia), Keys To Life (Victoria) the Year 2

Diagnostic Net (Queensland), and Getting the Foundation Right (New South Wales).

The Plan foreshadowed the development of "agreed national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, against which all children's achievements in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 can be measured"[7] (p. 21):

> *Systematic assessment information, through the establishment of benchmarks, assessment and reporting ... provides an accountability framework for reporting on expenditure on public education, and on student learning outcomes. Within this framework, schools and systems will be able to provide objective outcomes information ... to parents and caregivers in order to help inform their choices.* (p. 22)

Under the Plan, states are required to produce annual reports on outcomes for identified target groups. In turn, schools are required to provide state authorities with a detailed plan showing how students will meet minimum acceptable literacy standards, with those authorities being required to use rigorous assessment data on literacy and numeracy outcomes – where this is available – as a basis for allocation funds.

7. In Australia, schooling (primary and secondary) is generally of 12 years' duration, counted from Year 1 to Year 12.

## III. APPROACHES TO EQUITY

The developments described above illustrate different and changing conceptualizations of, and approaches to, equity, the main features of which are now discussed.

### Changing conceptualizations of equity in policy

Two aspects of equity are important: the economic and the cultural. Traditional approaches have been mainly concerned with economic inequality and the *redistribution of resources*, within which can be found three main traditions of thinking: liberal-individualism, market-individualism and social-democratic (Taylor et al., 1997, pp. 128-132). More recently, attention has been given to cultural aspects of inequality and the *recognition of difference*. Thus the terms which originally focused mainly on class inequalities have been reworked to address inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality.

#### Liberal-individualism

Within this view, there is a focus on ensuring that individuals have equal opportunities to access education. This is the distributive justice model, based on the assumption that "a uniformly resourced system would ensure that socially disadvantaged children would use their abilities to climb by means of schooling into the upper echelons of society" (Johnston, 1993, p. 108). It is seen as a 'weak' approach to equity policy: critics argue that the focus on the individual rather than the system is based on a view of underachieving individuals as being 'deficient' – a deficit view. So, for example, programmes for improving the access of girls to non-traditional areas of study are sometimes criticized for focusing too much on changing girls rather than on changing the male-dominated culture of those areas.

This conceptualization has underpinned the general approach to Australian schooling and funding, certainly until the time of the Schools Commission, and to a large extent since then. The *Review of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (DEET, 1995), for example, discussed in Chapter II, *Developments in indigenous policy*, identified an individualistic view of equal opportunities as one strand of thinking about indigenous education. Such a view, the review suggested, tended to see mainstream education - e.g. curricula, school organization – as unproblematic by arguing that individuals should adapt themselves to the requirements of the system. This perspective, it was suggested, held that "educational institutions can best respond to particular individual needs by offering special compensatory or remedial programme to help students compete more successfully in the 'mainstream'" (DEET, 1995, p. 15). A recent example of such thinking is perhaps seen in the decision by the Northern Territory government to replace bilingual education programmes with English-language-only programmes in indigenous communities, on the grounds that the poor learning outcomes of indigenous students are attributable to poor English language skills. The decision was highly controversial, with opponents arguing that poor outcomes reflect broader social problems as well as culturally inappropriate curricula and pedagogy.

### Social-democratic perspectives

Within this view, there is a focus on the unequal distribution of social and economic benefits amongst groups within society. The aim, therefore, is to produce equality of outcomes in schooling between social groups. Educational inequality is seen as linked to the way society is structured: some groups will perform better or worse than others in education because of the way education is linked to privilege in the social structure along lines of class, gender, race and ethnicity and geography. To counteract the tendency for education to reinforce

social inequality, proponents of social-democratic approaches argue that there is a need for changing the way education works. This could include such things as making curricula and assessment more inclusive, breaking down barriers between school and community, making school relationships more democratic. Such changes, it is argued, would make schooling more accessible to excluded groups. This approach therefore focuses upon whole school change and changes at the system level. Affirmative action strategies also fall within this approach – that is, strategies underpinned by a belief that disadvantaged groups may require additional resources or different treatment in order to achieve the same level of advantage as the rest of the community. While superficially similar to compensatory approaches which provide additional resources to compensate students for lack of resources, compensatory education and affirmative action strategies are philosophically distinct.

A social-democratic approach underpinned much of the Schools Commission's work, in particular the Disadvantaged Schools Programme, although Johnston (1993) – a strong proponent of the DSP – argues that in some respects the programme functioned in a compensatory manner. Such an approach can be found in some state programmes. For example, New South Wales describes its DSP as helping to "maximize the contribution that schools make to reducing the effects of socio-economic inequalities on students, communities and the wider society", supporting collective and consistent rather than individualized approaches (New South Wales Department of School Education, 1996, p. 1). (However, cutting across this approach is New South Wales' support for selective schools based on competitive entrance examinations and competitive external examinations at Year 12 level.) Similarly, South Australia's Equity Strategy is underpinned by a more structural approach:

> *We have moved beyond the simplistic response of locating responsibility with the individual. We have a better understanding of how responding to the needs of the individual is dependent upon understanding their relationship to and within the group. Schools and other educational institutions (often unwittingly) through curriculum offerings, personnel practices and organizational structures contribute to the construction of barriers to the access, participation, achievement and retention of many groups of learners* (Department of Education and Children's Services, c.1998, p. 4).

Critics of this approach argue that labelling individuals in terms of (disadvantaged) group affiliation constitutes a form of stereotyping. As noted earlier, this was the argument made in *Literacy for All*, and is reflected in the view of the Minister:

> *Dr Kemp [Minister for Education] strongly believes that not every kid from a low ses [socio-economic status] background has a literacy problem. The same goes for those from non-English-speaking backgrounds. He says that you don't stamp the kids on the basis of their backgrounds. Where the needs are you target the money rather than simply on the basis of background.* [interview: Commonwealth]

### Market-individualism

During the 1990s, in Australia as in most Western countries, the idea of equity became reconceptualized in line with the requirements of a more market-driven economy. In this approach, equity is conceptualized again in more individualistic terms.

From a market-individualist viewpoint, equity is still important, but the emphasis moves away from social redistribution to people's entitlements. In policy terms, this shift represents a cultural change which amongst other things implies a marketization of education in

which consumers' right to choose becomes paramount. The most obvious application of this approach has been in vocational education and training, where equity became expressed as an aspect of a 'client focus' (see Taylor and Henry, 1996). In schooling, market-liberalism operates more obliquely in the way education has been to some extent converted into a 'quasi market'. This has occurred through processes of decentralization of education systems and the application of principles of choice and competition to state schooling as a means of encouraging improved outcomes (see Marginson, 1996). This is one of the principles guiding the Commonwealth's literacy policy:

> *Choice is an important value in a democratic society and an essential foundation for school improvement ... Choice facilitates innovation and provides for greater involvement and commitment of both parents and students. Ideally, choice encourages schools to improve and respond to the needs of their students, making schools more accountable to students and parents* (DEETYA, 1998, p. 6).

To the extent that the aim of competition is directed at improving school performance and student learning outcomes, this approach can be seen as oriented towards the enhancement of equity. However, the efficacy of market-based approaches in producing good equity outcomes has been widely criticized (e.g. Gewirtz et al., 1995; Marginson, 1996; Lauder and Hughes, 1999). Thomson (1999) discusses how educational consumerism has helped to create unofficial league tables of schools based on academic performance, in ways that are often detrimental to schools in disadvantaged areas. In such a context, the critics argue, monitoring procedures in order to ensure compliance with equity goals remains a key issue.

### Recognition of difference

More recent approaches do not reject, but attempt to go beyond a redistributional approach. They recognize the cultural as well as

the economic dimensions of inequality, and so focus attention on the recognition of cultural difference as well as the need to address economic inequalities. They also pay attention to differences *within* social groups. Developments in gender equity policy which attempt to take account of cultural differences within the broad category of 'girls' or 'boys' (Chapter II, *Gender policy developments*) reflect this approach, as does South Australia's *Foundations for the Future*:

> *We have worked to establish a democratic, socially just and multicultural society which recognizes the fundamental right to be different and values diversity as a strength, bringing with it different experiences, ways of seeing, thinking and acting* (Department for Education and Children's Services, 1997, unpaged).

The issues are complex, because redistribution and recognition of difference often need to be pursued simultaneously in addressing social injustice. For example, race inequalities have a socio-economic component which demand a redistributive approach, as well as a cultural component for which a recognition approach is necessary (Fraser, 1997). This synthesis of approaches was seen in the *National Review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Education*, which argued for both additional funding and resources (redistributive approach) and recognition of difference among indigenous groups. There are additional complications because at times it is necessary to develop strategies which differentiate within social groups (for example in recognizing that girls are not a homogeneous group and that different strategies might therefore be required for Muslim and indigenous girls), whereas at other times it may be more useful to retain the notion of a different 'group as a whole' (for example in arguing that 'girls' require separate access to computer facilities because 'boys' tend to dominate computer rooms).

One example of an attempt to integrate the distributional and recognition approaches is seen in Young's (1990) work on social

justice. She put forward a conceptualization of social justice based on freedom from five aspects of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Oppression, she argues, cannot be addressed, simply, by redistributing opportunities and rewards; cultural changes are also required. So, for example, addressing institutionalized violence against members of specific groups:

> *may require the redistribution of resources or positions, but in large part can come only through a change of cultural images, stereotypes, and the mundane reproduction of relations of dominance and aversion in the gestures of everyday life* (p. 63).

An application of Young's ideas will be seen in Chapter VI, *Queensland's 'New Basics' project*.

### Justice as mutuality

A relatively recent conceptualization of equity is referred to by Gewirtz (1998) as 'justice as mutuality'. This approach is linked to discourses of citizenship, inclusivity and social capital, and is about the redistribution of responsibilities as well as resources (p. 473). Thomson (1999) summarized the concept of social capital in this way:

> *Social cohesion and trust are a by-product of social processes. A society with high social capital may be characterized as having a rich web of social and civic networks and a low degree of social division. Social capital can be created by public policies that facilitate, build on and institutionalize local social networks, but it is destroyed by public policies that disrupt, ignore and destroy the local social fabric. Local social networks are created by the actions of local institutions and local residents. When public policy values local social networks and democratic processes and builds them*

*into programmes and decision-making, then they become part of the wider social fabric and can be categorized as social capital.*

Application of the idea of social capital is only just beginning to influence equity policy, as will be seen in Chapter VI.

Policy approaches, then, have reflected differing conceptualizations of equity and social justice, sometimes bringing elements together in an eclectic mix. The mix reflects the fact that there are no absolute meanings of the concepts associated with equity, social justice and educational disadvantage. Rather, the terms are constituted historically and politically, reflecting struggles by social movements to influence policy agendas, and reflecting the way policies represent compromises between competing positions. Thus as Sturman (1997, p. 104) suggests, "... social justice appears to be ... at yet another crossroads in the politics of education", with debates about the appropriate approach to be taken, and in particular about the appropriate target for programmes and funding: individual disadvantaged students, recognized target groups, schools or regions.

These are the issues to be taken up now.

## Focus of equity funding and programmes

Debates around the funding of equity programmes have centred on whether the focus should be on:

- enhancing the general welfare of financially disadvantaged students; or
- improving literacy and numeracy in educationally disadvantaged students; or
- expanding the educational experiences and improving broad educational outcomes for disadvantaged students; or

- spreading funds across as many schools as possible or have them concentrated in schools identified as the most disadvantaged.

At issue here is the problem of focus: on disadvantaged student groups; on individual disadvantaged students; on individual schools or on regions; on specific programmes or on 'equity' more generally; on equity as a separate issue or as an ongoing part of school programmes.

### Targeting groups

A consistent approach underpinning policy development, funding and monitoring has been the identification and targeting of groups whose educational participation or performance has been below the average. Identified groups have varied over time and across the states, but the groups identified in the NSES represent a reasonably stable categorization. To repeat, these are:

- students with disabilities, with learning difficulties or behavioural disorders;
- students at risk of dropping out of school;
- students from low socio-economic backgrounds or living in poverty;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- students from non-English-speaking backgrounds;
- students who are geographically isolated.

With the introduction of the *National Strategy for Equity in Schools*, girls were no longer classified as an equity target group, though gender remains a significant area of concern. All systems have developed programmes and policies in gender equity with a growing interest, as noted, in boys' education. The Commonwealth has not usually included gifted and talented students as an equity target group, but some states have, for example Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

At the same time, it has increasingly become recognized that these categories are not homogeneous and that they interact with each other. Thus Quin et al. (1994), in a report looking at the funding allocations of *National Equity Programme for Schools*, argued that ways need to be found to target more accurately multiple or interacting forms of disadvantage. For that reason, although targeting still remains the prime means of directing funding and for reporting outcomes, some states are now funding on the basis of a cluster of characteristics rather than groups. For example, Victoria's Index of Special Learning Needs comprises six factors: Aboriginal enrolment; proportion of enrolment receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance or AUSTUDY (subsidized education for students from low socio-economic backgrounds); transience/mobility; family circumstances (e.g. living with neither or one parent); languages other than English spoken at home; occupation of highest-earning breadwinner. New South Wales utilizes a composite socio-economic index which takes into consideration parental income, background factors such as language differences and differences in learning styles, and data on students' achievement, outcomes, attendance and truancy (New South Wales Department of School Education, 1996).

### Targeting individuals, schools or regions

From some perspectives, disadvantage is best addressed by targeting individual students, the approach adopted in Victoria:

> *We have moved away from specific programmes. And the whole philosophy of the SGB (School Global Budget) is that you fund on individual students, on individual characteristics. In Priority Programmes, funding has gone into per-student funding. Similarly, with disability and other areas, the school is given an allocation per student and it is then up to the school how the money is spent - no longer do guidelines specify how resources are to be spent* [interview: Victoria].

Under Victoria's school-based management system, schools operate on a global budgeting system, meaning that they have the capacity to spend their allocated funding according to their own priorities, provided central policy guidelines are followed. Core funding to schools includes an equity element, with additional funding for Students at Educational Risk, using the Special Learning Needs Index noted in Chapter III, *Targetting groups*.

Queensland uses the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage to allocate funding to schools. Schools must indicate in their annual operational plans how funding will be used to meet system equity priorities. The Australian Capital Territory, with a relatively small and homogeneous student population, uses a database to track students and allocate funding to schools on the basis of students identified as disadvantaged by the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage. Again, funding for equity purposes is incorporated into schools' global budgets for principals to disperse.

Whichever approach is adopted, reporting is carried out in terms of targeted student groups. There is therefore an ambiguity in approach which creates difficulties for systems that focus on individuals: to find ways of maintaining the focus on groups for the purposes of monitoring and reporting on outcomes, while collecting data on individual students. Conversely, even those systems with a group and community focus need to find ways of collecting individualized data in order to produce their identified categories. Hence in practice, individualized and group approaches tend to sit alongside each other. Additionally, in some instances, equity-related funding may be channelled through regional offices rather than individual schools. For example, regions may be funded to provide resource teachers who work across several schools within a region to assist with the integration of students with disabilities. (However, regions have never been the prime locus of equity funding.)

## Broadbanding

In 1994, with the development of the *National Equity Programme for Schools*, the Commonwealth broadbanded its Special Purposes programmes (e.g. English as a Second Language, Disadvantaged Schools, Gender, Disabilities). This meant that funding to states for equity purposes was given as a lump sum, with education authorities being able to move the money around between and across categories, rather than being tied to specific programmes. Some systems adopted this change in their own structures while others continued to fund separate programmes for identified target groups.

There were several reasons for broadbanding. For administrative convenience, the Commonwealth government wished to bring separate equity programmes within a single accountability structure which would be negotiated between the Commonwealth and the states against a nationally agreed set of educational objectives and with a more focused reporting of educational outcomes (Rizvi, 1994). It was argued that broadbanding would give schools greater discretionary capacity to address local priorities (within overall guidelines) and thus facilitate 'whole school' approaches. It was also argued that broadbanding would acknowledge what was already widespread practice in schools. At a more theoretical level, broadbanding was advocated as a way of recognizing that elements of disadvantage interacted and could not be seen as separate or discrete 'bundles'. For example, Aboriginal girls attending schools in impoverished regional areas would be affected by factors of gender, cultural background, distance and class simultaneously (Rizvi, 1994). Broadbanding, then, took account of the criticism that "programmes which target particular social groups have themselves become too deterministic, causing people to draw stereotyped conclusions which fail to take account of the factors, not common to all members of a group, which contribute to their educational experience and disadvantage" (Rizvi, 1994).

Thus the intention of broadbanding was to enable systems to use equity funding to develop programmes that would recognize the particular ways in which various elements of disadvantage came together in particular school communities. Broadbanding was seen by some as reducing the Commonwealth's commitment to equity because of reduced accountability for spending money on specifically identified equity programmes. At the same time, broadbanding was seen as useful within systems for encouraging co-operation between units previously working in isolation (for example, cultural diversity and gender).

Again, in 1997, another form of broadbanding occurred when Disadvantaged Schools and English-as-a-Second-Language programmes were incorporated into the new literacy programme, with somewhat changed guidelines for the states. Under this arrangement, education authorities would have "the flexibility to use the funding to greatest benefit in addressing the key educational issues of improving literacy and numeracy levels of Australian schoolchildren" (Lingard, 1998, p. 7). Again, this move created controversy. Opponents argued that the literacy focus detracted attention away from broader equity concerns; proponents argued that literacy is the key to success or failure at school, and so the emphasis on literacy would facilitate a clearer focus on strategies likely to promote more equitable outcomes of schooling. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter V, *Literacy and numeracy as surrogates for other forms of educational disadvantage*.

### Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is the term used to denote the idea or practice of bringing equity programmes into core activities, rather than seeing them as separate. Mainstreaming therefore can refer to funding or to philosophy. For example, the mainstreaming of gender equity in New South Wales means that although there is a separate unit dealing with gender issues, there is no separate funding stream for gender equity

programmes. Rather, funding for these draws on programme money from other units. Similarly in Victoria, there is no separate funding for gender equity: it is expected that gender equity should be reflected in all Key Learning Areas from kindergarten through to Year 12.

As an idea, mainstreaming could be characterized in this way:

> *I want to be in the mainstream – in the planning, delivery, accountability and reporting frameworks that will be used – to have equity embedded in that, but visible enough to have it in there rather than a model which says: we've done our mainstream stuff, now let's put our equity stuff in there. The first one is much harder to do, because you risk a lot – but in the long run, you can have more effect* [interview: Queensland].

Mainstreaming is a contentious issue. Opponents argue that the practice allows systems to neglect equity needs, while proponents argue – as above – that mainstreaming brings equity in from the margins. This problem was identified in the report by Quin et al. (1994) referred to earlier, which recommended that the *National Equity Programme for Schools* should retain the approach of making separate allocations to target groups. Citing an OECD report, it stated:

> *The 'group' focus can prove invaluable in its emphasis on concrete, real-world matters and its sensitivity to particular needs and problems rather than compounding together all disadvantages, risks and sectional concerns* (OECD, 1991, p. 3, in Quin et al., 1994, p. 49).

It noted, however, that such an approach may encourage a view of equity as the province of special action while leaving the mainstream untouched.

Increasingly there is an attempt to combine the two approaches of targeting and mainstreaming. South Australia's gender equity programmes, for example, pay attention to specific groups of disadvantaged girls – girls with disabilities, girls living in poverty, Aboriginal girls, pregnant schoolgirls and early school-leavers – while also introducing a wide range of initiatives to address gender issues in the mainstream curriculum (MCEETYA, 1995b, pp. 63-65). Similarly, the NSW gender equity strategy for 1996-2001 asks schools to identify "the ways in which gender can be addressed in Key Learning Areas" as well as to develop strategies giving explicit attention to students "whose educational performance is at risk for gender-related reasons" (New South Wales Department of School Education, 1996, p. 8).

## IV. MONITORING AND REPORTING

### The shift to an outcomes focus

A significant development in implementing equity policy has been the shift of focus from process to outcomes, reflecting developments in public management and corporate governance more broadly (Taylor et al., 1997, pp. 81-85). Elements of an outcomes approach include:

- target setting;
- performance indicators to assess the achievement of stated targets and goals;
- one-line budgeting giving units greater autonomy as to how funding can be applied to achieve desired goals;
- auditing, both financial and educational.

Such principles are now incorporated into all state systems, with schools required to develop plans and targets against which performance (including performance on meeting equity targets) can be appraised. In turn, the states report to the Commonwealth, with outcomes published in MCEETYA's annual reports on schooling. All systems require reporting against targeted groups regardless of any broadbanding of funding or administration.

As noted earlier, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education is funded separately. Depending upon the source of funding, reporting may occur through the annual national reports or through performance agreements and performance appraisal mechanisms. For example, an Indigenous Education Agreement between the Commonwealth and States sets out agreed performance indicators and targets against which funding is provided, with provision for conducting audits of enrolments and performance if

required by the Commonwealth. Performance indicators and targets reflect national priorities, with a focus on elements such as:

- culturally inclusive curriculum:
  - provision of Indigenous Studies programmes to all indigenous students;
  - professional development for all teachers of indigenous students on indigenous learning styles and pedagogy;
  - identification of indigenous languages being used in school communities;
  - significant progress in maintenance and use of indigenous languages by indigenous students where required by indigenous communities;
- attendance targets;
- retention rates, e.g.:
  - 100 per cent in primary school;
  - 90 per cent in Year 10 (currently 76 per cent);
  - 50 per cent in Year 12 (currently 31 per cent).

More simply, performance appraisal under the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* sets out a range of objectives (e.g. raising cultural awareness, provision of education and training services) against which providers are required to answer three questions: What did you do? What happened as a result? How effective was it?

With respect to its Literacy and Numeracy Programme, the Commonwealth has moved to establish national benchmarks of performance for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. States have agreed in principle to outcomes-based reporting against standardized testing, but achieving agreement on the benchmarks was a long and controversial process. Difficulties arose because of the different policy approaches in each state, and because the purpose of benchmarks was not clear. Was the

aim to differentiate 'good' and 'bad' schools in order to assist parental choice? Or was the purpose primarily diagnostic, aimed at helping schools and systems to diagnose and remedy problems? Would schools, therefore, receive extra funding or be penalized for poor performance? Nevertheless, the underlying rationale appears to have been accepted. As one state administrator acknowledged:

> *... the interesting point now with the emphasis on literacy and assessment is that in the past - say five to ten years ago - none of the schools [in this state] would have touched that with a bargepole - but they have gradually come more to the view - the Commonwealth view - that we have to be more accountable* [interview: Australian Capital Territory].

What this reflects is the extent to which the outcomes-based accountability processes of corporate governance have become normalized within education systems over the past decade or so.

Thus in Victoria, for example, school annual reports and the triennial school review provide the formal framework for assessment of school performance. School performance benchmarks are outcomes, not process, focused: "They analyze the results of school processes and help schools to answer the question: 'Is what we have achieved good enough?'" (Department of Education Victoria, Office of Review, 1997, p. 7). School performance benchmarks are presented for schools across the state - or for 'like schools' which take into account the composition of student population in assessing performance. Schools are categorized into nine sub-groups according to the socio-economic and language composition of the school population using the following factors: students who receive the Educational Maintenance Allowance (those eligible for the Commonwealth Health card) or students receiving AUSTUDY; and the proportion of students who speak a language other than English at

home. It is planned to incorporate data on gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for future 'like schools' comparisons.

In Queensland, a Performance Measurement Office was set up in 1997 to ensure data collection from schools and the system to report against organizational goals. The establishment of the Performance Measurement Office was a deliberate strategy to change from a 'soft' inputs and a process approach to an outcomes approach, seen as necessary, according to one administrator, to remain competitive and to be able to justify funding provided. There was a view that broad performance data at school and system level would provide better arguments for the allocation of resources:

> *We can then have conversations about 'distance travelled' and 'value added'. Encouraging schools to map student progress over time and identify the best practice which lies behind the data ... cannot be done without the data* [interview: Queensland].

Thus the Performance Measurement Office, in addition to collecting data on standard factors such as retention, access, participation and destinations was also attempting to broaden the focus to include social outcomes of schooling:

> *We hope to raise the profile of the other outcomes of schooling ... In the past there was more of a focus on inputs and processes. If we are going to look at outcomes we need to backward map from those outcomes to identify the processes which make a difference.*
>
> *Queensland, like Victoria, is using the concept of 'like schools' as one means of assessing schools' effectiveness in promoting equity objectives* (Education Queensland, 1998).

The move by the states to outcomes-based reporting is welcomed by the Commonwealth, which sees the process as providing "information that schools have never had before – making use of

more and more for ongoing monitoring of performance" and of supporting the stated Commonwealth aim of providing "objective outcomes information" to inform parental choice [interview: MCEETYA]. Significantly, although the Commonwealth is "moving towards allocating funds to schools on the basis of literacy and numeracy outcomes" (DEETYA, 1998, p. 5), outcomes-based performance is not yet linked to funding:

> *That's the huge, huge issue and we don't know the answer. That's why nothing has really changed. Because to make the shift to link outcomes with funding would be the huge shift. No one is ready for that. We don't have the data to do it, or the framework. We're starting to explore the issues* [interview: Commonwealth].

In other words, whether schools will be rewarded (i.e. given extra resources) or punished (have funding withdrawn) for poor literacy performance outcomes remains undecided. Australia, then, has not gone down the British road of identifying 'failing schools'. Rather, systems were "likely to remain in a purgatory position which allows Commonwealth to make judgements either way" [interview: ACT]. From a rigid outcomes perspective, the processes by which results are obtained are deemed irrelevant. However, the Commonwealth is still interested in, and has commissioned research on 'what makes a difference', and for the states, qualitative assessments of how outcomes are achieved remains important.

## Qualitative indicators of equity

Qualitative assessments of progress in implementing equity initiatives attempt to evaluate inputs and processes as well as outcomes. For example, New South Wales seeks to clearly identify "the pressures which schools need to resolve [against which we] can identify more tangibly what the outcomes and indicators could be in

light of what we want them to achieve" [interview: New South Wales]. An example of this might be:

> units of work which integrate multicultural perspectives into learning areas, taught and assessed as though they were part of a key learning area. So, it is not a question of 'doing very well', but of being satisfied that a school has gone through the full process of implementation.

Another example:

> DSP (in New South Wales) has set up a system of peer support and review. So schools with common programmes across the state meet together and talk on the basis of a range of indicators around an identifiable area - and say what they have found, what worked well ... what their experience was, etc. In that process, the district superintendent gets a feel for how well things are working.

In Queensland, the Social Justice Review (Queensland Education Department, 1995) carried out by the Quality Assurance Directorate indicates another form of outcomes reporting. Here the concern is with practices rather than outcomes, based on the assumption that "... the identification of areas of school practice requiring improvement was very likely to lead to improvements in student outcomes for students from the least advantaged groups" (unpaged). The review aggregated the results of over 200 schools and demonstrated the use of benchmarks to measure aspects of procedural justice – that is, aimed at making schools more humane and democratic. Benchmarks included elements such as inclusive decision-making, diversity of staffing and the quality of parent (and citizen) participation. This review provides perhaps the only example of the development of outcomes measures for procedural justice.

An outcomes reporting framework alone delivers ambiguous results in terms of furthering equity goals, as will be discussed in Chapter V, *From evaluating processes to measuring outcomes*. For those interested in more process-oriented assessments, outcomes reporting can nevertheless be used strategically. As one policy officer put it, an outcomes approach is useful for diagnosis: "There are some CLP [Commonwealth Literacy Programme] schools that are performing significantly better than other schools ... there's something happening within those schools that we ought to be promoting" [interview: South Australia].

Another argued that the outcomes approach:

> *has taught us to be strategic – a bit cold and hard... responsibility lies with teachers and principals. ... In the bureaucracy, performance-based funding has helped us to be focused and strategic. We have tried to look at it as a positive thing ... [that people] needed to be accountable* [interview: South Australia].

## V. DISCUSSION: CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES

The Commonwealth government's focus on, and approach to, literacy and numeracy appears to do three things: make literacy and numeracy a surrogate for other forms of educational inequality; conceptualize educational disadvantage in individualistic terms; and reinforce an emphasis on outcomes rather than processes. In doing this, there are both continuities and discontinuities with older approaches. These shifts need to be placed in the context of two other broad trends: an ideological commitment to expanding private schooling to create a more competitive educational market; and the move to school-based management. These issues form the focus of the discussion here.

### Literacy and numeracy as surrogates for other forms of educational disadvantage

The rationale for the literacy and numeracy focus is that poor literacy and numeracy skills are the prime markers of educational disadvantage – and are most often, though not necessarily, to be found amongst the already identified target groups. Thus, the proponents argue, the literacy and numeracy focus concentrates resources and pedagogy on the area most needed and for the students most in need.

Critics argue that the literacy approach represents a significant loss because it does not directly address the complex mix of factors which lie behind poor literacy and poor school performance, such as was possible under the former Disadvantaged Schools Programme:

> *With a literacy tag, a lot of the other things that were possible to do [with the DSP] tend to be tenuous in terms of the linkages, for example supporting kids on excursions, breakfast programmes – a whole range of things that impact on kids' learning* [interview: Australian Capital Territory].

The lack of attention to factors of poverty and low socio-economic status was a particular concern, with some arguing that in the new focus, "poverty has become invisible" [interview: South Australia]. It was suggested, for example, that the pool of money for students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds was reduced. This was because the new approach did not recognize:

> *that low income has a differing impact from, say, a middle-class family whose child just hasn't learned to read or write because of other factors. So money now has to be spread across more kids than those coming from low-income backgrounds. ESL [English as a second language] dollars are also more thinly spread around to other kids* [interview: Australian Capital Territory].

Others disagreed. For example, one former DSP activist argued that poverty, far from being neglected, was now a mainstream issue. However:

> *... the mainstreaming of poverty is taking away its potency as an activist issue. In that sense, people see it as dropping off the agenda. There is no longer an emotional bind among people working on the issue* [interview: New South Wales].

For this administrator, the literacy focus did not ignore questions of social structure; rather, he suggested, class factors in particular had become a central reference point in thinking about equity issues, including literacy:

> *socio-economic issues – [social] class – six or seven years ago, no-one would have understood this apart from DSP people. Now at the top of the system, class is recognized as one of the key determinants of educational outcomes... This is not to say that it is clear what to do about it – people's politics determine different strategies. But it is now recognized that you can't have a literacy strategy without being concerned with issues of low socio-economic*

*status. So the literacy strategy has a clear strand to do with that. But the key point is that there is recognition that these social variables have to be addressed by the system.*

While some are somewhat critical of the shift to a literacy focus, others see scope for a better focusing of resources and effort and a possibility that equity matters might now be addressed more centrally by schools and systems. As one interviewee put it, knowledge about 'making a difference' is no longer the sole preserve of equity programmes, and it is now possible to usefully align equity objectives more closely with mainstream objectives:

*The crux is identifying common objectives – moving away from the idea that equity programmes are grains of sand in the oyster of the system which might produce a pearl. Being in the margin resulted in marginalized status. Bringing our objectives together has helped to overcome money jealousy* [interview: New South Wales].

Thus, for some, the new literacy focus complemented rather than negated older concerns with educational and social disadvantage.

## Individualistic conceptualization of equity

In contrast to the more structural approach of the Disadvantaged Schools Programme, the Commonwealth Literacy Programme conceptualizes educational disadvantage in individualistic terms. That is, funding is allocated on a *per capita* basis rather than on the basis of the socio-economic status of a school's community. As noted, the programme aims to remedy individual literacy skills, but without assigning individuals a group status on the grounds that it may unfairly stereotype people. Of course, in practice there is a group focus: in the understanding that literacy is associated with characteristics such as gender, socio-economic background, cultural background etc.; and

in terms of reporting requirements. Thus, as noted, group and individualistic orientations tend to sit side by side and the current challenge is to work out ways of combining these approaches appropriately.

Critics of the individualistic focus argue that the focus on the individual decontextualizes the child from its community and does not properly address the multiple factors influencing learning. They point to a radically new social context resulting from economic globalization, characterized by high levels of localized poverty, unemployment, youth homelessness and alienation, increasing levels of crime: in short, a lack of social as well as economic capital (Thomson, 1999). Many Aboriginal communities can be characterized as disadvantaged in these terms, as can a number of suburbs or regions of all of the capital cities and many rural regions.

## From evaluating processes to measuring outcomes

The requirement for outcomes to be measured against outputs, defined in terms of performance on standardized tests of literacy[8] represents for many the major shift in direction. Even here, though, there may be continuities with the former DSP. According to one former activist, there were tensions in the programme between those arguing for procedural-based social justice (that is, for schools to be more democratic), and those supporting attainment-based social justice (improved student performances). It could therefore be argued that there are continuities between the latter strand in the DSP and the new literacy framing. While, as noted in Chapter IV, *The shift to an outcome focus*, many saw advantages in an outcomes focus, concerns were raised about the longer-term danger that in the pressure to perform well on national standardized tests, broader educational goals may be distorted.

8. Although the new approach encompasses literacy and numeracy, at this stage most attention has been paid to the development of literacy benchmarks and assessment.

### What are the data telling?

Improved literacy scores on standardized tests may be due to various factors including:

- better teaching to the test;
- more sophisticated responses to a testing regime (like ensuring that 'problem students' do not attend school on testing days); or
- improved teaching and learning.

Clearly, not all of these factors are desirable, but standardized testing in itself cannot reveal which of these is happening. However, the dangers of reductionist pedagogy – that is, teaching to the test or manipulating the test scores – become very real in the context of increasing competition between schools and the need to improve performance, discussed in Chapter IV, *Expanding private schooling to create a comprehensive educational market* and Chapter V, *School-based management*.

More fundamental, perhaps, is the point that test results fail to capture the full picture of how schools may be contributing to students' educational outcomes:

> *Even in [disadvantaged] schools, equity-based funding constitutes a tiny fraction of the money which goes into that school. Therefore it's impossible to isolate the factors which contribute to the outcomes in the kids at that school. Plus there are the broader social influences. Therefore within existing systems, it's not possible to come to any conclusions about the effects of [particular] programmes* [interview: New South Wales].

To the extent that equity initiatives in schools may be reduced to producing good literacy results, the new policy approach marks a big

change from prior approaches. Further, the pressure to collect such data creates a problem of validity.

### Lack of valid data systems

In the words of one administrator, it is not possible to "get evidence of change when there aren't valid systems for collecting evidence which are comparative and verifiable, sophisticated in what they are judging. This isn't there" [interview: New South Wales]. Part of the problem is that, despite the Commonwealth's claims, not all systems and schools have databases that can readily identify the information that is required. And even if they do have these databases:

> *they may not be well maintained. As schools become more and more resource-stretched and pressures on teachers increase, finding bodies to maintain databases is not easy – particularly given that many teachers are hostile to the changes and see little benefits to be gained by gathering yet more data for DEETYA* [interview: New South Wales].

## Expanding private schooling to create a competitive educational market

In the context of Australia's Competition Policy, the Commonwealth government is ideologically committed to expanding private education on the grounds of improving parental choice. To this end, since 1996 it has abolished the New Schools Policy, increased funding to private schools and introduced a mechanism referred to as the Enrolment Benchmark Adjustment Policy (EBA). The New Schools Policy restricted the establishment of new private schools to areas not already serviced by existing state (public) schools. Under EBA, private schools receive approximately $1,500 dollars per every student enrolled from a state school, while each state school loses

an equivalent amount for every student who leaves the system. Given that allocations for teachers are based on established teacher/student ratios, at times the loss of just a few students may result in the loss of several teachers. Together, these policy developments actively encourage the establishment of low-cost private schools and help to erode enrolments in public schools.

For opponents of this policy trend, the broader question of funding for public education is the most central equity issue needing to be addressed. There are fears that the state system will become 'residualized', that is serving only those who cannot afford a private education, or those students with learning and behavioural problems or special needs who may not be accepted by the private schools. For some, the residualization of public education is likely to increase inequality in the education system regardless of any relatively small Commonwealth equity programmes.

### School-based management

The decentralization or devolution of state bureaucracies in favour of various forms of school-based management has occurred in all states to a greater or lesser extent. While arguments for school-based management had their genesis in the participatory democracy movements of the 1970s, in practice school-based management has occurred in a context of reduced funding and pressure to attract enrolments in a competitive climate. Under such circumstances, schools are pressured to seek 'market advantage', a process in which promoting equity is likely to have limited value. Therefore, unless guarantees for equity spending are built in or accountability measures are required, equity is likely to remain precarious in most schools and school systems.

## VI. SOME EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

Presented in the following two sections are examples of useful approaches to equity which are being implemented either within individual schools or more broadly within systems. In Chapter VI, *Underlying principles*, these are briefly summarized.

### Full service schooling[9]

The concept of full service schooling was pioneered by two non-governmental organizations, the Australian Centre for Equity through Education (ACEE) and the National Schools Network (NSN). The NSN is a professional development, research and curriculum support network, based on a membership system that includes schools, universities, education systems, teacher unions and parent organizations. ACEE is an intersectoral body comprising education, community health and social services, which provides policy analysis, research and professional development. It aims to find ways of achieving successful transition from school to further education or work for those students who are disadvantaged by social, geographical, economic or health factors and who are most excluded from education. Key members of ACEE and the NSN were active in the Disadvantaged Schools Programme, and so a number of principles embodied by that Programme – for example a focus on whole school approaches and on developing productive links between schools and communities – have been carried over into the work of these newer organizations.

The concept of full service schools responds to the pressures of deepening social and economic inequalities in Australia,

9. This section draws substantially on a report prepared for the Australian Centre for Equity Through Education by Stephen Kemmis (1999), entitled: *The ACEE/NSN Full Service Schools Research Circle*. At the time of writing, this report is unpublished.

characterized by communities with high levels of poverty, high levels of youth alienation and a significant number of people being on the edges of welfare (Thomson, 1999). Full service schools aim to improve links between education, health, housing and welfare services and to counteract an ideology of individualism which precludes more collaborative approaches in schooling. Full service schooling aims to build partnerships across schools and communities, and to plan and develop school-linked services supporting students and their families.

In 1997, ACEE undertook a project to test the idea of full service schooling. The broad aims of the project were to:

- develop school-community linkages for community development and inter-agency service co-ordination;
- improve curriculum and classroom work through school and educational development; and
- establish and maintain the processes necessary for the development of the full service school.

As part of the project, a Full Service Schools Research Circle was developed, comprising two schools funded by the project, with two other Aboriginal schools funded through DEETYA and one other school funded through the Catholic Education Office. In addition, 'open day' meetings were held over the two years of the project's life (1998-1999) to enable non-funded participants to join in discussions.

The principal aims and activities of the Full Service School Research Circle were to:

- develop inter-agency links that assist schools in the integrated provision of services (including health, welfare, housing and other support services) to children, young people and their families;
- strengthen the role of schools as active partners in community development;

- assist within-school change processes aimed at making schools more inclusive for students, their families, and their community – for example, through innovation in curriculum and school organization.

It was stressed that the full service school should not be seen as just another label for community schooling – engaging the community more intimately in the life and work of the school. To be more than this, the school had to draw on the resources and expertise of other agencies also serving their communities.

The project utilized the methodology of participatory action research, aimed at transforming participants' practices and workplaces. Meetings of the Circle allowed time to report on progress with practical action at each participating site, and also time for discussion of readings on related topics (e.g., full service schooling, and models of school-community interaction) which were circulated before each meeting. By working simultaneously at the levels of theory and practice, the Circle aimed to develop systematic knowledge about the problems and possibilities of full service schooling.

The work of the Research Circle was underpinned by a commitment to social justice, drawing on the work of Young (1990) whose theory of social justice described five elements of oppression: exploitation; marginalization; powerlessness; cultural imperialism; violence. The Research Circle saw schools as involved in all five forms of oppression. For example:

- Schools were seen as exploitative in the sense that they allow some to accumulate educational (and thus social) benefits while others are excluded from gaining them. Hence the aim was to develop forms of partnership, community involvement and inter-agency

co-ordination which might lessen these exploitative effects – for example, by developing more inclusive social relationships within and beyond the school.

- In terms of cultural imperialism, schools were seen as often ignoring the different perspectives of cultural groups outside the cultural mainstream. The Research Circle attempted to assist in the development of approaches to schooling and service delivery in which previously excluded groups were more genuinely included in the curriculum and decision-making processes of schools.

In attempting to address such injustices, the Research Circle schools looked at:

- in-school issues of selection and organization of curriculum content, pedagogy, assessment and evaluation;
- school-community issues of consultation and negotiation, planning, decision-making and service delivery;
- inter-agency links. Examples of these included:
  - consultation with local service agencies directed towards the development of co-operative programmes and co-ordination of efforts on behalf of students and their families (e.g. outreach counselling programmes offered through schools, special education programmes offered through schools for students in care, development of school programmes directed at enhancing the learning, safety and health of all young people);
  - student involvement in in-school programmes jointly developed with other service providers (e.g. violence awareness, student mediation in dealing with violence in schools, student production of pamphlets dealing with issues of gender and cultural difference);
  - work experience programmes with local employers and businesses;

- co-operation with local technical and further education colleges, secondary and primary schools to improve educational pathways and access for students, and to provide access to vocational education and training for secondary students in secondary colleges;
- formal community and inter-agency consultation days aimed at improving co-operative efforts between schools and other agencies (e.g. local government youth services, local health service providers, education unions, providers of residential care services for children and youth, local welfare service providers, police and Department of Justice youth programme providers).

One of the key insights to emerge from the project was the recognition that a full service school is a site at and from which various kinds of collaborative activities and services are offered. These involve not only school students and staff, but also students' families and communities, and various service agencies. These initiatives are not controlled and managed by a school on its own; they operate through shared control and management as *joint* initiatives.

Changing schools and relationships between schools, communities and other agencies was found to be a slow process given the way schooling has evolved as an autonomous institution. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the Research Circle were positive, in terms both of deepening participants' understanding of the interrelationship between educational and other services such as health and welfare, and in terms of finding effective ways of creating new partnerships and working across sectors.

At one of the Aboriginal schools, for example, new ways were developed of ensuring that the Aboriginal Health and Housing Co-operative collaborated with the school to meet the needs of students

and their families. At one of the secondary schools, new outreach initiatives were planned to meet the needs of youth who, for various reasons, were beyond the reach of conventional schooling. At another, new ways were developed of making the curriculum more inclusive, to respond more fully to the concerns of a diverse school community. At the primary school, new working relationships were established with families and community welfare agencies to strengthen the support available to families facing various forms of stress – including the stresses of poverty and violence.

*Comment*

This example illustrates the importance of including teachers as active participants in educational reform, and the importance of research in informing practice. It also reveals tensions between the expectations of education systems about student outcomes, and meeting the actual needs, interests and aspirations of young people, families and communities.

Kemmis (1999) argues that outcomes-based education has turned the focus of schools away from the individual needs of students to pushing them through to reach externally-set outcomes that may not all be relevant to them. This has created pressure on schools, as the community may be expecting all of the energies of the school to be directed towards these prescribed outcomes and not wasting time on what could be termed 'social' or 'developmental' issues. There is a tension, Kemmis suggests, between the development of, on the one hand, an 'organic', integrated, negotiated curriculum which includes all students and, on the other, a fragmented, outcomes-based, linear curriculum. It is, therefore, very difficult for people with a preference for collaborative involvement when this runs contrary to the product- or outcomes-oriented approach of many government bureaucracies.

Trying to combat a narrow outcomes approach to education is one aim of Queensland's 'New Basics' project, the other example of good practice to be discussed.

## Queensland's 'New Basics' project[10]

Education Queensland (formerly the Department of Education, Queensland) developed a '2010 strategy' as part of a broader government strategy for turning Queensland into a 'smart state' able to boost its economy on the basis of a skilled workforce. The 2010 strategy aims to make schools technologically advanced and to reorient curriculum and pedagogy around the demands of a knowledge-based economy (for example by better integrating vocational and general education and providing flexible pathways between school, work and further education). In 1999, as part of this strategy, Professor Allan Luke, an expert in the area of literacy, was seconded as Deputy Director-General for six months with a brief to envisage new approaches to teaching and learning, incorporating:

- new life pathways requiring flexibility and lifelong education;
- the need to prepare students for knowledge- and service-based economies;
- the need for schools and education to build and renew sustainable, cohesive social communities.

Such a brief was not explicitly oriented towards addressing educational disadvantage. But behind the 2010 strategy was a concern with declining retention rates in public schools and the potential residualization of public education given the drift of enrolments to private schools. The 2010 strategy aimed to reinvigorate public

10. Information for this section comes from Education Queensland (1999) *2010: A future strategy* and Education Queensland (2000) *New basics: theory into practice*.

education and, as such, was in essence concerned with addressing issues of social and educational inequalities. Issues of pedagogy and curriculum, rather than management structures, were put at the centre of inquiry, with a prime focus on the role of teachers. This was to acknowledge that: "Restructuring to this point has been done to teachers rather than with them; they have been the objects rather than the subjects of educational policy" (Lingard et al., 2000, p. 94). The term 'New Basics' was coined to signal the blend of old and new skills and attributes seen as significant for the production of the kind of human capital likely to drive the Queensland economy.

Changing an entire state system is, of course, an immense challenge. As part of the process of developing a conceptual framework, wide-ranging consultative processes with teachers, principals and academics – including a web-site conversation board – were established. The purpose of this consultative process was not only to 'sell' the strategy, but also to draw on the innovations already occurring in individual schools. Some schools, for example, were attempting to challenge the focus on narrowly defined skill outcomes by developing 'intellectually rich tasks'; others were exploring ways of integrating the junior school curriculum into new, interdisciplinary fields; others were developing models of 'authentic assessment' around teacher-moderated tasks instead of standardized tests. Such ideas became part of the New Basics project.

A trial implementation of the New Basics is occurring during 2001-2002 involving 20 schools or clusters of schools. Underlying principles include the attempt to 'unclutter' the curriculum and move towards curricular integration, and to counter the national move towards large numbers of outcome statements per year level by specifying a very few, simple, intellectually rich and educationally worthwhile tasks at key junctures of students' educational careers. For example:

- that all Year 6 students will have completed and presented in writing and performance a full report cycle on a current issue about the Australian legal or governmental system;
- that all Year 3 students will have prepared a web page about their families and communities that blends visual and written texts with hot links to other sites;
- that all Year 9 students will have generated a household budget using current spreadsheet software.

As Luke comments, many skills, types of knowledge and competences 'hang off' each of the tasks: "But the key is that they're rich, intellectually challenging and demanding, requiring an integration of various curriculum traditional areas, and that they're of real power and use in the new economic and cultural contexts" (1999, p. 2).

The New Basics are organized around four clusters or areas of inquiry which, together, address "the interactive requirements of new life worlds and future orientations" (Education Queensland, 2000, p. 3). The four areas are:

- Life pathways and social futures:
  - living in and preparing for diverse family relationships;
  - collaborating with peers and others;
  - maintaining health and care of self;
  - learning about and preparing for new worlds of work;
  - developing initiative and enterprise.
- Multiliteracies and communications media:
  - blending traditional and new communications media;
  - making creative judgements and engaging in performance;
  - communicating using languages and intercultural understandings;
  - mastering literacy and numeracy.

- Active citizenship:
  - interacting with global and local communities;
  - operating with shifting cultural identities;
  - understanding local and global economic forces;
  - understanding the historical foundation of social movements and civic institutions.
- Environments and technologies:
  - developing a scientific understanding of the world;
  - working with design and engineering technologies;
  - building and sustaining environments.

The New Basics curriculum is envisaged as taking up, approximately, half a child's school curriculum time, with the other half devoted to 'challenging options', for example language studies, which are to be explicitly community-based.

Associated with the New Basics is the concept of 'Productive Pedagogies', used to highlight the importance of teachers in changing approaches to education. It denotes the idea that "different pedagogies might make a difference for different groups of students, including those usually regarded as disadvantaged" (Lingard et al., 2000, p. 96). Importantly, it assumes that "students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are most dependent upon schooling for their life chances, are usually those most likely not to be the recipients of intellectually demanding pedagogical practices" (ibid., p. 98). The Productive Pedagogies model operates around four dimensions: intellectual quality (e.g. higher order thinking and critical analysis); connectedness (e.g. connecting with students' background knowledge or to real-life contexts); supportive classroom environment (e.g. providing a socially supportive environment) and recognition of difference (e.g. making attempts to increase the participation of students from different backgrounds). The model is of interest because of research findings showing that while teachers

generally rate highly in providing supportive classrooms, they are less effective in developing strategies that recognize students' differing backgrounds or that promote higher order learning or critical analysis skills in students (Lingard et al., 2000).

*Comment*

There is still a long way to go to translate the ideas expressed here into changed practices in schools, though the trial project has now commenced. In addition, there are broader contextual factors which may work against the reforms – for example, the competitive market context alluded to previously, and unchanged macro-assessment processes which rank all students seeking entrance to university. In such a context, it is possible that the 'New Basics' could simply become another tool for differentiating privileged and disadvantaged schools and students. The basis on which disadvantaged schools should be funded also remains unresolved.

However, of interest is the way in which this approach, at the system level, embraces some of the principles of inclusivity spelled out in the example of the full service school. That is, the approach appears to mandate a core curriculum alongside options more relevant to the local community. Importantly, the core curriculum is not narrowly defined in terms of traditional academic norms or assessed in terms of narrowly-specified tests of competence. If such a core curriculum can be implemented, it will go some way to systemically 'mainstreaming' some of the principles for addressing educational inequalities. Also of interest is the emphasis placed on teacher professionalism, with significant funding being made available for professional development.

## Underlying principles

These principles will be stated quite briefly as summary statements arising out of the two examples outlined in the preceding sections.

### Curriculum and pedagogic principles

1. Students cannot be abstracted from their social context. Teaching, learning and assessment cannot be reduced to discrete, measurable tasks. These are hardly new insights, but need to be restated in light of the dangers presented by a narrow view of outcomes pedagogy.

2. Curriculum and pedagogy need to be intellectually challenging. Too often, too little is expected of students labelled as disadvantaged.

3. A core curriculum needs to encompass a much wider range of skills, knowledge and experiences than that typically associated with the competitive academic curriculum.

### Professional development

1. Changes such as the ones described in the two examples above have significant implications for teachers' professional development, particularly in light of the shift to school-based management. Previously, in centralized systems, the criticism was often made that professional development did not relate to the specific needs of schools. There is now some concern, however, that the decentralization of professional development has gone too far, so that some system priorities – such as equity – may be neglected. Queensland is attempting to reconcile tensions between centralized and decentralized professional development

approaches by introducing a system whereby funding for professional development goes directly to schools, but within a framework of system priorities giving guidance as to how money might be spent.

2. Professional development must be oriented towards providing teachers with more holistic views of student learning. Many teacher education courses are dominated by psychological approaches which emphasize individualistic approaches to teaching and learning.

### Whole school approaches

1. Sustainable reform can only occur at the level of the whole school. Individual teachers may provide useful innovations and good role models for students; but their efforts are transitory and at times may be countermanded by the overall ethos of schools or systems. By contrast, a whole school approach generally entails not only collaboration within the school community, but also between schools and systems and communities. The issue of schools' role in forming social capital may be relevant here, linked to much broader notions of equity.

2. In a market context, mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that all schools are adequately resourced in order to be able to develop effective whole school approaches and in order to ensure that all schools comply with the basic tenets of equity.

### Intersectoral approaches

Whole school approaches need to be complemented by 'whole of government' approaches, in recognition that the lives of students and their families are not easily separated into discrete areas of 'education', 'health', 'housing' and so forth. In this context, the

question remains of how useful the current literacy focus may be for addressing educational and social disadvantage. Intersectoral approaches, while not incompatible with a focus on literacy, call into question a narrow view of literacy testing which abstracts the student from social context. In the words of one spokesperson from ACEE:

> *We're seriously trying to put the money together to address the complex range of problems in schools. There's lots of lip service for this, for example the 'whole of government' rhetoric. Some of this is useful. For example, housing has taken on educational issues and health. ... What we're hoping is that that kind of approach at various levels will push people to see that it's more than literacy that we have to focus on if we want better outcomes.*

### Social cohesion and social capital

Social inequality cannot be reduced, simply, to educational inequality. Put another way, educational inequality exists as part of a more complicated mix of other social factors. Thus the focus on human capital development has to be complemented by a concern with social cohesion and the development of social capital.

### Style of leadership

Implicit in the above principles is a style of leadership that is collaborative, supportive of teachers and knowledgeable about social change. Leadership of this style needs to be exerted at both school and system levels.

## The appropriate mix of top-down and bottom-up policy approaches

An ongoing policy problem is to find a framework that balances local needs and system requirements. The Full Service School example

demonstrated the first; Queensland's 'New Basics' project demonstrated the second. Both are attempting to acknowledge the equation. For example, full service schools are oriented towards serving the particular needs of local communities – but within a framework of systemic support. The 'New Basics' project specifies centrally mandated objectives alongside curriculum options that relate to the local context.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Two significant system-level trends are highlighted by this report. The first has been the shift from an essentially needs-based funding approach to one looking for 'literacy and numeracy outputs'. It is not clear yet how useful the literacy focus may be for addressing educational and social disadvantage. Luke et al. (1999) argue that the literacy focus neglects the structural dimensions of educational and social disadvantage. While this may be true, there does seem to be some consensus that the outcomes focus can be useful, provided that outcomes include qualitative measures of performance that focus on school processes rather than on quantitative outcomes or outputs alone.

The other significant trend has been the shift to school-based management and global budgeting. How individual schools address problems of educational equity and disadvantage has not been looked at in this report but remains a critical issue. While the deleterious effects of devolution in a market context have been noted, it is also important to note that there are good arguments in favour of schools having greater control over staffing, curriculum and so forth in order to make schooling more relevant and accessible to students and parents. Many parents seek more from schools than academic success. It is possible, therefore, that innovative approaches to addressing educational disadvantage and improving equity can be promoted by schools as part of their strategy for achieving 'market share' in a competitive context.

More broadly, is it possible to draw any conclusions about the comparative effectiveness of the different policy approaches outlined in this report? As indicated, the Commonwealth government has commissioned research on 'what makes a difference', but this report suggests that the answers are as much ideological as empirical. Policy-

making is never value-free. Policy-makers establish their own context and their own definition of the problem that their policies are meant to address (Taylor et al., 1997, Chapter 3). There is evidence to suggest that educational inequalities have changed over the past 20 years or so: students from working-class backgrounds are more likely now to make the transition from schooling to tertiary education, as are some groups of girls and some groups of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Marks, 2000). The extent to which these changes are due to policy, and the extent to which they are due to broader social changes – the expansion of tertiary education, labour market changes, the impact of feminism – remains unclear. Some would point to the efficacy of programmes such as the Disadvantaged Schools Programme, the National Policy for the Education of Girls, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, etc. in making schooling more accessible for disadvantaged students. Others would point to poor literacy and numeracy levels amongst many of the disadvantaged groups as indicative of the failure of those policy approaches to make much headway in redressing educational inequality. In practice, this report confirms what appears to happen most of the time: i.e. that incremental change and reform result from lessons from past policy approaches being absorbed and adapted to new definitions of the problem and new policy contexts.

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## The book

Equity is a complex issue and inevitably raises a number of debates. Should equity issues be addressed by specific programmes or brought into the mainstream? Should funding be earmarked or should schools be given the leeway to distribute resources as they see fit? By what means should disadvantaged groups be identified? Is equality of opportunity sufficient to meet the needs of disadvantaged students?

This booklet does not attempt to give set answers to these and other questions, but rather gives an overview of the different policy approaches applied within the Australian public school system. It highlights two general trends, which are the shift towards school-based management, and a funding approach increasingly oriented towards literacy and numeracy outputs. Within the context of these system-level trends, it discusses the merits and flaws of different policies and provides some examples of good practices.

**Policy approaches to educational disadvantage and equity in Australian schooling**

## The author

*Miriam Henry is a Senior Lecturer in the Education Faculty of the Queensland University of Technology. She has published widely and undertaken consultancies on educational policy, gender issues in education and the labour market, and equity and social justice in education. She is the author of two previous monographs for the IIEP: The restructuring of higher education in Australia (1994), and Women in a competency-based vocational training system: the Australian experience (1996). Most recently, she has co-authored a publication on The OECD, globalization and policy making in education (2001).*

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